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PLACEMENT TESTING--FROM FLES TO HIGH SCHOOL. A REPORT OF THE MODERN LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT AND PLACEMENT TESTING PROGRAM OF WEST HIGH SCHOOL, BAKERSFIELD, CALIFORNIA.

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AS THE RESULT OF A CALIFORNIA LEGISLATIVE MANDATE FOR A COMPREHENSIVE LANGUAGE PROGRAM BEGINNING AT THE SIXTH GRADE LEVEL, WEST HIGH SCHOOL SET UP A TWO-FOLD LANGUAGE ACHIEVEMENT TEST TO ACCURATELY PLACE QUALIFIED STUDENTS IN ADVANCED COURSES AND TO GET A GENERAL IDEA OF THE LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT OF INCOMING STUDENTS WITH VARIOUS DEGREES OF PREVIOUS LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE. THE TWO TESTS USED TO EVALUATE LISTENING AND READING SKILLS WERE--(1) COMMON CONCEPTS FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEST, PUBLISHED BY THE CALIFORNIA TEST BUREAU, AND (2) BALTIMORE COUNTY SPANISH TEST, PUBLISHED BY THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY,--BOTH CHOSEN BECAUSE THEY MOST ACCURATELY MEASURED THE OBJECTIVES OF THE LANGUAGE PROGRAM IN WEST HIGH SCHOOL. FINAL DECISION FOR PROMOTION IS BASED ON TEST RESULTS, STUDENT-TEACHER (TESTING INSTRUCTOR) CONFERENCE, STUDENT REQUEST, PARENTAL APPROVAL, AND TESTING INSTRUCTOR'S RECOMMENDATION. A SCALE IS INCLUDED TO SHOW THE RESULTS OF THE ACHIEVEMENT TESTS USED. (SS)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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PLACEMENT TESTING: FROM FLES TO HIGH SCHOOL*

As a result of the increased importance placed on foreign language instruction today, the California Legislature has mandated a comprehensive program to begin in the elementary schools at the sixth grade level. Already this year, the results of this program can be felt. Many schools, aware of the far-reaching implications of the Casey Bill, have been planning and organizing an effective foreign language program in advance of the initial deadline.

These programs are a reality which all high schools must accept, whether in California or in Indiana. We must begin now to analyze the affects of this new language program, beginning on the elementary level. We must experiment, test and organize our curriculum to accomodate the forthcoming changes. The high schools cannot ignore those students who will come to them with prior language experience. We must assess their abilities and meet their needs. The communities which support our programs should and do expect us to fulfill this task.

In the final analysis, serious efforts toward coordination at all educational levels are necessary. The high school teachers and administrators must counsel with the elementary and junior high educators, as well as maintain liaison with the language departments in the colleges and universities. If the objectives of the school language programs are to be secured and continued, it is then up to each elementary and high school to face the challenges of the program and plan accordingly. This report attempts to illustrate one such effort being made at West High.

Due to the increasing numbers of students reaching high school with a background of foreign language training, we at West High felt that a dependable evaluative program should be initiated. Past experience had demonstrated that a program of advanced placement, entirely based on student-teacher conference and review of previous language training, was unreliable and seldom produced satisfactory results.

In the spring of 1966, the Modern Language Department at our school decided to establish local norms for advanced language placement by administering to its first year language students two types of language achievement tests at the end of the term in June. Some 225 beginning students in Spanish were tested.

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Although the immediate need for such norms was in Spanish, these tests were given to all first year students in French and German as well. This testing program will continue each year. Thus, we will acquire additional data for use in each language as the needs arise.

Achievement in a modern foreign language is basically two-fold: oral and written. There are four separate skills to be mastered in the learning process: 1) aural comprehension (listening and understanding the foreign language), 2) speaking, 3) reading, and 4) writing. These skills must be tested separately when assessing the students' progress.

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*A report of the Modern Language Achievement and Placement Testing Program of West High School, Bakersfield, California. The school has approximately 2,000 students.)

The tests given in our first year Spanish classes tested two of these skills, listening and reading. Speaking is a difficult skill to test objectively. Its omission was not considered detrimental to the attainment of our testing objectives.

Although writing skills are easily tested, such a test was not incorporated in our program for two reasons: 1) no professionally developed testing program was found that met our needs for the writing test, without a major revision in the test items; and 2) in the first level of our program, writing skills are least emphasized of the four to be mastered.

The following tests were selected for our program: 1) Common Concepts Foreign Language Test, published by the California Test Bureau, and 2) Baltimore County Spanish Test, published by the Bobbs-Merrill Company. These tests were selected primarily on the basis of how accurately and how comprehensively they measured the objectives of our language program (content validity). Also considered was the reliability of the tests, their clarity, their ease of administration and scoring, and their length.

The Common Concepts Test was considered to be the best available test to measure the aural comprehension of a student who has pursued an audio-visual type language course.

Other available tests were considered. Those tests ultimately chosen for our program seemed best to meet <u>our</u> needs. For this reason, it should not be interpreted that those tests would be desirable and satisfactory for any or all school systems undertaking a similar project. Each school system should assess carefully its own objectives and only on that basis make a selection of the testing instruments to be used.

First, the students took the Common Concepts test. This is a picture association test. It consists of 80 items and is entirely oral. Secondly, the students were given parts A and B of the Baltimore County Spanish Test. This is a standardized achievement test which attempts to measure, in separate sections, both the listening and reading skills. Part A is a timed test of 60 items which covers vocabulary, reading, culture, and grammar. The oral section of part A is a true-false test of 30 items. Part B is completely oral and consists of 55 items which test aural comprehension in various ways. The oral sections of parts A and B of the Baltimore County test were administered using the taped voices of West High School language instructors, instead of the taped voice provided.

It should be noted that these tests are heavily weighted with oral sections. This was purposely done, to conform to our teaching methods, which are audio-oriented. The elementary schools also emphasize mastery of the oral aspects of the language first.

The local norms from these tests were derived as follows. All tests for students who indicated any language experience prior to the first year at West High were eliminated. Also, tests were eliminated for those students who came from a home where the language is spoken. This was done to insure the sample would be valid. The resulting sample, which was acquired and used as the basis for our norms, was reduced from the approximately 225 tested to 70. (The drastic reduction is due to the strict procedures used. If a student had had even two weeks of prior

Spanish, he was eliminated from the norm sample. Also, where there was any doubt about the reliability of our information on a student, his test was eliminated also.) The testing results are graphically represented on page 4.

On the Common Concepts test, the high score was 68 out of 80. The low score was 32. (Range of scores: 37) The median score was 45 and the mean score was 46.7. These scores are 56% and 58% respectively on a standard percentile scale. The mode was 42.

On part A of the Baltimore test, the high score was 70 out of 90. The low score was 36. (Range of scores: 35) The median score was 47 (52%tile) and the mean score was 48.5, (54%tile). The mode was 45.

On part B of the Baltimore test, the high score was 50 out of 55; the low score was 24. (Range of scores: 27) The median and mean scores were the same: 34 (60%tile). The mode was 36.

No attempt was made on any test to compare results with the standardized national norms. Differences in sampling techniques, textbooks, and other pertinent elements would have rendered results of any comparison useless. An attempt was made to correlate test results with the final grades, for both the first and second semesters, of the students tested. This did not prove too useful, since the tests were administered and scored to show the oral and written skills separately. Letter grades do not illustrate these differences, but are rather a composite of these elements. An arithmetic average of the test scores would not yield a statistically accurate composite score. A more elaborately scientific evaluation was not undertaken, due to lack of time and funds.

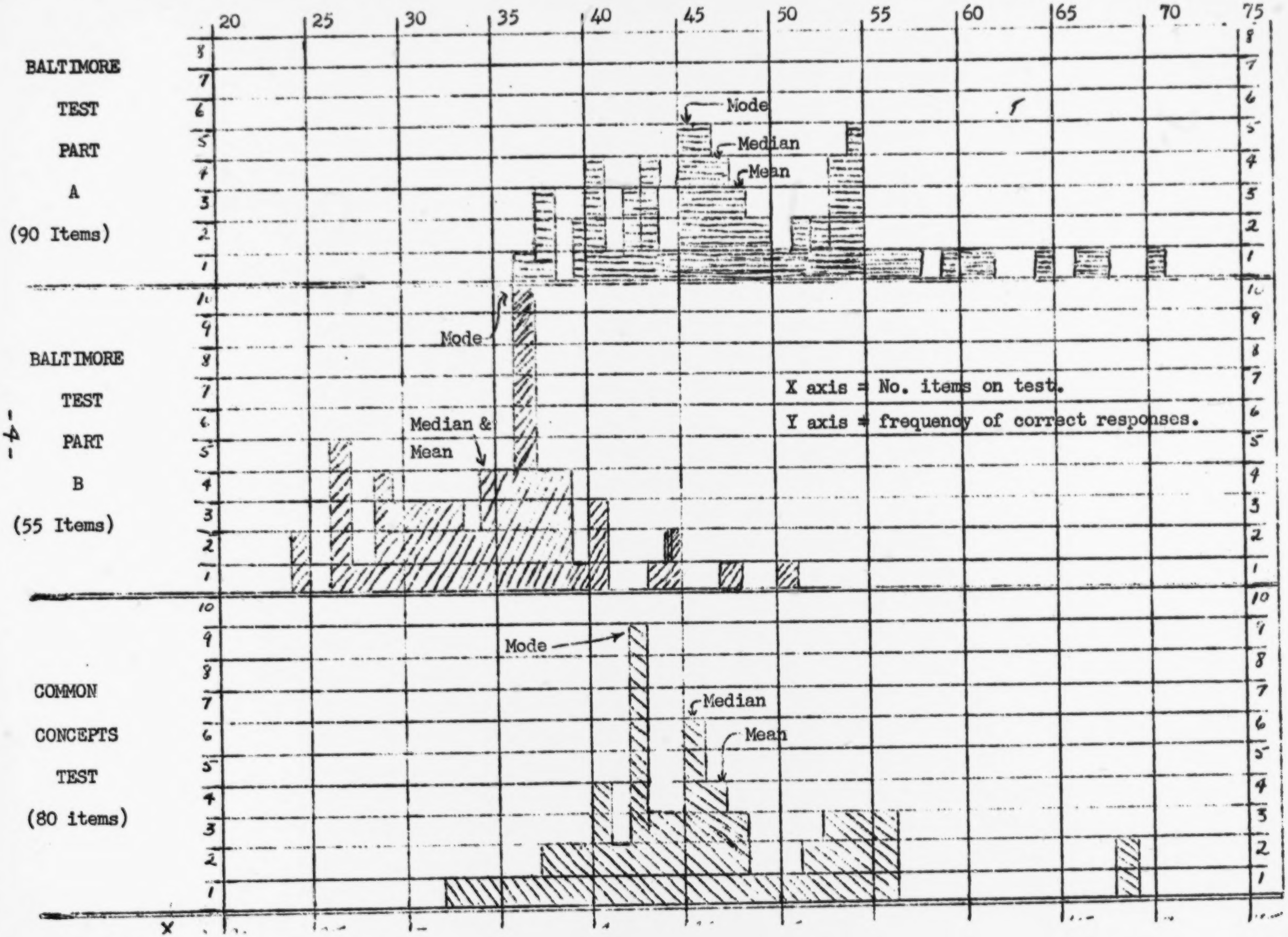
Nevertheless, the results of the testing were useful to establish a placement testing program for this fall. The report of its results follows.

Placement Testing Program, Fall, 1966-67

Using the results of the above-mentioned tests, a set of standards for promotion to second year Spanish was prepared. It was decided that any student who was tested and received a score of 58 (13 above the median) on the Common Concepts test and a score of 60 (13 above the median) on part A of the Baltimore test would be <u>considered</u> for promotion to Spanish 10 (second year). These scores could fluctuate plus or minus "2" on the Common Concepts test and "5" on the Baltimore test, part A.

Part B of the Baltimore test was not used in this program for two reasons. First, the length of the other two tests was already in excess of 90 minutes. Secondly, it was felt that the Common Concepts test was an adequate measure of the aural comprehension skill.

Identification and testing for advanced placement was accomplished as follows. At the beginning of the school year each Spanish 9 student (first year) was requested to fill out a Foreign Language Experience Inventory (see copy attached). From the information thus acquired, a list was compiled of those students who fell into two categories:


BALTIMORE
TEST
PART
A
(90 Items)
Mode
Median
Mean
BALTIMORE
TEST
PART
B
(55 Items)
Mode
Median &
Mean
COMMON
CONCEPTS
TEST
(80 items)
Mode
Median
Mean
X axis = No. items on test.
Y axis = frequency of correct responses.
20
25
30
35
40
45
50
55
60
65
70
75
X

1) native speakers of the language*, and 2) those who indicated two or more years of elementary school experience in Spanish.

Of the total Spanish 9 enrollment of 250, 104 students indicated some previous experience. First to be tested were those from a home where Spanish was spoken and those who had studied Spanish for three or more years. Also tested was one student who had lived for two years in a Spanish-speaking country. Finally, those with two years of experience were tested.

The testing had two aims: 1) to properly place qualified students in advanced courses, and 2) to get a general idea of the level of achievement of students coming to us at this time from various backgrounds of foreign language experience.

A total of 36 students were tested. Most of these students were entering Freshmen, although a few were upperclassmen. Of this total, 10 students qualified for promotion to Spanish 10. Six of these students were actually assigned to second year Spanish as the result of the testing program.

Final selection for promotion was based on all of the following factors: 1) test results, 2) student-teacher (testing instructor) conference, 3) student request, 4) parental approval, and 5) testing instructor recommendation.

Of those given advanced placement, only two came from Spanish-speaking homes. The third student had spent two years in Columbia. The remaining three were products of elementary school language training.

Of those qualified, but not promoted, two came from Spanish-speaking backgrounds. The other two received their training in elementary school. The reasons for non-promotion varied. Usually, it was the student's feeling that he wished to strengthen his background further before going into advanced work.

The success of this program has yet to be fully demonstrated. As of now (the end of the first semester), no student who was promoted has asked to be returned to beginning Spanish. All are doing "B" work or better. Last year, without the benefit of our testing program, only one or two of approximately 10 students who were promoted, remained in Spanish 10 for more than six weeks. A follow-up report on our project will be made at the end of the year.

This year the program was better organized, and more time for advance planning was available. Already, we are planning to conduct next year's placement testing prior to the opening of school, during our pre-counseling activities. Students, having already been identified when they registered for their program, would be tested and placed in the appropriate language class before school opens.

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*It might seem odd that native speakers of Spanish should be tested. However, experience has shown that the average Spanish-speaking student does very poorly in reading and writing, with a minimum knowledge of grammar.

It is hoped that this type of program will be continued and refined in the future.

E N D O F R E P O R T

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Walter E. Pederson
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[1967]

Teacher(or Counselor) _____ CAS(Rev.-3)4/28/67

MODERN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT
WEST HIGH SCHOOL
BAKERSFIELD, CALIFORNIA

MODERN LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE INVENTORY

Fill out this form as correctly and as carefully as possible. The exact details of information requested are important. Please do your best in providing the answers.

NAME_____ SCHOOL_____ GRADE____

DATE_____ DATE OF BIRTH_____ AGE_____ SEX_____

LANGUAGE IN WHICH YOU ARE NOW ENROLLED_____

LANGUAGE IN WHICH YOU PLAN TO ENROLL IN HIGH SCHOOL_____

****

LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE

With what languages (other than English) have you had experience?

1._____ 2._____

For each language mentioned above, give the information requested.

ELEMENTARY AND JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

Number of years studied: 1._____ 2._____
Length of daily classes: 1._____ 2._____
Number of weekly meetings: 1._____ 2._____
Last school you attended: 1._____ 2._____
Your last grade in language: 1._____ 2._____

HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

Number of years studied: 1._____ 2._____
Last school attended: 1._____ 2._____
Last grade in language: 1._____ 2._____

If you learned any of the above languages at home, please explain under additional comments.

Have you ever lived in a country where the language you know is the national language?_____ What country? _____
For how long did you live there? _____

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS: